

# EARLY GRADE SUCCESS



Texas Education Grantmakers Advocacy Consortium

**TEXAS PHILANTHROPY KNOWS THE VALUE OF HIGH-QUALITY EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION AS EVIDENCED BY DECADES OF PHILANTHROPIC INVESTMENT IN AGES BIRTH THROUGH EIGHT. OVERWHELMING RESEARCH INDICATES FULL-DAY, HIGH-QUALITY PRE-K PAVES THE WAY FOR STUDENT SUCCESS BY IMPROVING SCHOOL READINESS AND EARLY GRADE ACHIEVEMENT.**

Texas educators also know the value of full-day, high-quality pre-k. According to the 2016 Meadows Foundation/Children at Risk Pre-K report, *Pre-K in Texas: A Critical Component for Academic Success*, economically disadvantaged third graders who attended full-day Texas pre-k had 40 percent higher odds of reading at a college-ready pace in 3rd grade than economically disadvantaged students who did not attend Texas pre-k. These same students also scored approximately 80 points higher on the 3rd Grade STAAR Reading exam when they had both quality Texas pre-k and a quality K-3 education, further proof that the gains of quality pre-k persist.<sup>1</sup>

In the 2016-17 school year, more than 211,000 eligible three- and four-year-old Texas students were enrolled in optional public school pre-k.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately, Texas only supports half-day pre-k through the school funding formula. In the past, the state increased pre-k support by funding numerous pre-k grants and supplemental line items. The most recent example of this was the Texas Legislature's \$118 million appropriation to fund the High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten Grant Program (HB4) in 2015, which was an important step towards improving pre-k quality in Texas.

In 2016, TEGAC commissioned Texans Care for Children to explore district participation in the High-Quality Pre-Kindergarten Grant Program. The research showed that districts serving 86 percent of the state's eligible pre-k population received the grants and spent the funds to hire classroom aides to reduce teacher-student ratios, purchase new curricula, offer additional professional development to teachers, and other worthy investments. However, districts were concerned that the one-time funding boost, which amounted to just \$734 per student, was insufficient to have a lasting impact on pre-k quality across the state.<sup>3</sup>

Unfortunately, Texas leaders eliminated the grant program during the 2017 legislative session yet kept the higher quality standards in place through Budget Rider 78 without pairing those quality requirements with any additional support. In 2018, TEGAC commissioned Texans Care for Children and the Commit Partnership to conduct an online survey of school districts to explore how Texas school districts are responding to the elimination of the High-Quality Pre-K Grant Program in 2017.

Learn more about our 2018 research findings and 2019 policy recommendations on the second page.

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## 2018 RESEARCH FINDINGS

- The Legislature's 2017 pre-k cuts and new unfunded mandates were harmful to districts' pre-k programs, as well as programs outside early education. The loss of funding led school districts to cut back on important investments, such as professional development, early childhood-focused personnel, and technology and materials.
- Districts offering full-day pre-k reported the greatest challenges from the pre-k cuts. Districts overwhelmingly aspire to provide high-quality, full-day pre-k.

## 2019 POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Invest in formula-funded, high-quality, optional full-day pre-k to improve school readiness and early grade success.
- The Legislature and the Texas Education Agency should continue to collect and analyze data on Texas pre-k programs, and identify opportunities for additional pre-k program improvements.

## REFERENCES

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- 2 Raise Your Hand Texas. Fund Pre-K the Right Way. 2018. [https://www.raiseyourhandtexas.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/04\\_ActNow\\_2019-legislative\\_one-pager\\_pre-k.pdf](https://www.raiseyourhandtexas.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/04_ActNow_2019-legislative_one-pager_pre-k.pdf)
- 3 Texans Care For Children. Texans Care For Children: Ensuring the Success of HB4 & Texas Students - A Preliminary Analysis of the Texas High-Quality Pre-K Grant Program. 2016. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5728d34462cd94b84dc567ed/t/57eab179e6f2e1db284f34f7/1474998652581/2016-PreK-HB4-Report.pdf>



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